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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANJUL 000329

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TAGS: PGOV PREL GA SG NI IR AU

SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: TIES WITH NIGERIA, SENEGAL, IRAN

REF: BANJUL 230 ET AL (NOTAL)

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOSEPH STAFFORD, REASON 1.4 (B AND D)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Nigerian President Obasanjo reportedly indicated May 19 a willingness to engage in renewed mediation between The Gambia and Senegal. The May 20 visit here by Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister was part of a "charm offensive" by Tehran in West Africa, according to Gambian official. END SUMMARY.

RESUMED NIGERIAN MEDIATION WITH THE GAMBIA AND SENEGAL?

¶2. (C) We note that, according to a Nigerian media report, Nigerian President Obasanjo has indicated willingness to mediate between The Gambia and Senegal amidst GOTG's suspicions of GOS complicity in the coup plot thwarted here March 21 and of harboring plot's ringleader (reftel). Reportedly, Obasanjo told visiting Gambian Foreign Minister Lamin Kaba Bajo May 19 that he would be "personally engaged in efforts to resolve the issues on which both countries currently disagree."

¶3. (C) COMMENT: Obasanjo has a record of effective mediation with the Gambians; in October 2005, he participated in a meeting in Dakar with the Gambian and Senegalese Presidents that resolved an August/October dispute over transport and border issues. Subsequently, in February, he visited Banjul in a successful effort to defuse growing strains between President Jammeh and opposition leaders. There is talk that Obasanjo will use the AU summit scheduled here for July 1-2 to mount a renewed Senegalese/Gambian mediation effort. END COMMENT.

VISIT BY IRANIAN ENVOY

¶4. (U) The local media reported the May 20 visit to The Gambia by Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mohamed Reza Bagher, billed as a "special envoy of the Iranian President." After meeting with President Jammeh, Bagher spoke of the Iranians' desire to strengthen bilateral ties and cited, in particular, the areas of trade, energy , fisheries, and culture.

¶5. (C) Discussing the visit with Ambassador, Foreign Affairs Permanent Secretary William Joof said the Iranian's visit was a part of a West African tour that he described as a "charm offensive by Iran" in the sub-region. Discussing the visit in ho-hum terms, Joof said that it had produced no new bilateral agreements and that Jammeh had complained to the Iranian about Tehran's failure to implement past cooperation agreements (e.g. training of

Gambian energy officials) signed over the years. According to the Gambian official, Jammeh told Bagher that Tehran needed to cooperate with the "international community" on the nuclear issue. Asked whether the Iranian had engaged in lobbying on issues with an eye to the upcoming AU Summit here, Jooof responded in the negative.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: Iran has no mission here, visits to the Gambia by Iranian officials are rare, and our sense is that the overall Gambian/Iranian relationship is minimal.

Doubtless one constraint on the two sides' relationship is Jammeh's staunch, public opposition to the sorts of hard-line Islamist policies espoused by Iran -- and its support for terrorism. END COMMENT.

STAFFORD